DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 776 SO 034 502

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TITLE	Civics: What Do 12th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?
INSTITUTION	National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCES-2001-461
PUB DATE	2001-10-00
NOTE	8p.; Previous issues also titled "NAEP Facts." For related documents, see SO 034 500-501.
AVAILABLE FROM	ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. Tel: 877-433-7827 (Toll Free); e-mail: edpubs@inet.ed.gov. For full text: http://www.ed.gov/ pubs/edpubs.html.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Research (143)
JOURNAL CIT	NAEPfacts; v6 n4 Oct 2001
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship; Citizenship Education; *Civics; Grade 12; High Schools; *Knowledge Level; Performance Based Assessment; *Social Studies; *Student Evaluation; *Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*National Assessment of Educational Progress

ABSTRACT

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Civics Assessment measured students' knowledge, their intellectual and participatory skills, and their civic dispositions at the 12th-grade level. This publication describes 12th graders performance on 38 questions from the 12th-grade assessment. Thirty-one of the thirty-eight questions were multiple choice. The remaining seven were constructed response questions that required students to write their answers. The goal of the NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment was to measure how well U.S. youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities. The framework for the 1998 Civics Assessment specifies three interrelated components which, taken together, reflect broad civic competency: knowledge, intellectual and participatory skills, and civic dispositions. The questions required 12th graders to read and answer questions based on a variety of materials. The assessment was designed to evaluate student ability to recall specific information, make inferences, or perform more analytical/ evaluative tasks, such as distinguishing opinion from fact or defending a position. (Author/BT)

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ED 473 776

Civics: What Do 12th Graders Know, and What Can They Do?

National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
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SO 034 502

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THE NATION'S REPORT CARD NAEP

NAEPFACTS

Vol. 6 No. 4 October 2001

Civics: What Do 12th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?

Abstract: *The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Civics Assessment measured students' knowledge, their intellectual and participatory skills, and their civic dispositions. This issue of* NAEPfacts *describes 12th-graders' performance on 38 questions from the 12th-grade assessment.*

The goal of the NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment was to measure how well American youth are being prepared to meet their citizenship responsibilities. One way to obtain an understanding of the range of student performance is to look at individual questions on the assessment and the percentage of students who gave a correct response to those questions.

The assessment administered to grade 12 students included 152 questions. Thirty-eight of these questions, together with student performance data, scoring information, and additional data, are available at the NAEP website (**http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/**).

This issue of *NAEPfacts* arranges the 38 released questions in order of difficulty, as determined by the percentage of 12th-grade students who answered them correctly. These 38 questions provide examples of student performance but do not give a representative sample of the complete range of questions on the assessment. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is unable to release enough questions to provide a fully representative sample. Most questions must be kept confidential so that they can be reused on future assessments, permitting comparability of results for the assessments.

The framework for the 1998 civics assessment specifies three interrelated components which, taken together, reflect broad civic competency: *knowledge*; *intellectual and participatory skills*; and *civic dispositions*. Each question has a knowledge and intellectual skills component. Some of the questions also measure participatory skills and/or civic dispositions.

The questions required 12th-graders to read and answer questions based on a variety of materials. The assessment was designed to evaluate students' ability to recall specific information, make inferences, or perform more analytical or evaluative tasks such as distinguishing opinion from fact or defending a position.

For example, students were asked "The primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to A) limit the spread of slavery in the United States B) limit the power of the federal government C) establish judicial review D) allot specific powers to the states." Sixty-five percent realized that "B" was the correct answer.

Frequently, students would be asked several questions on a single topic. For example, students were given four questions to answer about the U.S. Supreme Court's 1905 decision in the case of *Lochner vs. New York*.

Thirty-one of the 38 available questions from the 12th-grade assessment are multiple-choice questions with four possible answers. This means that students had one chance in four of getting these questions right, merely by guessing.

The remaining seven sample questions are "constructed-response" questions, which require students to write their answers. It is harder for students to get these questions right by guessing. Short constructed-response questions have three possible scores—"Complete," "Partial," and "Unacceptable." Extended constructed-response questions have four possible scores—"Complete," "Acceptable," "Partial," and "Unacceptable."

For purposes of this analysis, only "Complete" and "Acceptable" answers to extended constructed-response questions are reported. For short constructed-response questions, only "Complete" answers are reported.

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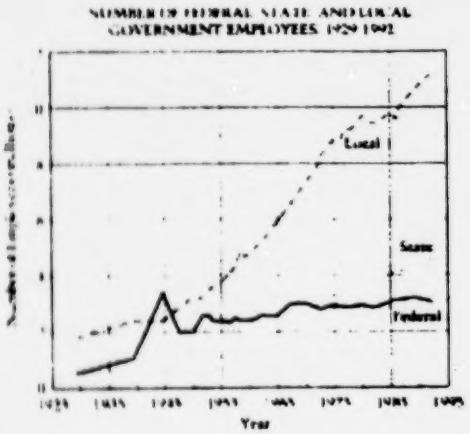
NCES 2001-461

Note: The following chart gives summary descriptions of 38 sample questions from the NAEP 1998 Civics Assessment for the 12th grade, arranged by the percentage of students who answered them correctly, from the highest to the lowest. Multiple-choice questions are identified by an "(MC)" at the end of the question. For these questions students were choosing the "best" answer available, which was not necessarily the answer they would have given themselves. Each constructed-response question includes the full text of a student's answer that received a "Complete" score, with students' grammatical and other errors left unchanged.

100%

90 percent recognized that the American Association of Retired Persons would be likely to be opposed to severe cutbacks in the Social Security program. (MC)



83 percent understood that one explanation for the data shown in this graph is that local governments employ more people than do state or federal governments because local governments meet the direct needs of so many people in so many different places. (MC)

76 percent recognized that the First Amendment of the Constitution and Article 22 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights showed a common concern for individual rights. (MC)

73 percent recognized that the federal government would likely become involved in the decision about where to locate a landfill if the landfill threatened to cause the quality of the reservoir water to fall below the standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). (MC)

72 percent understood that the framers of the Constitution wanted to limit the power of majorities in order to protect the rights of individuals and minorities. (MC)

69 percent correctly interpreted the following statement by Judge Learned Hand to mean that individual liberties depend on citizens committed to the protection of those liberties: *I often wondered whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lives in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it.* (MC)

67 percent knew that *Plessy v. Ferguson* allowed states to have "separate but equal" educational facilities. (MC)

65 percent recognized that the primary purpose of the Bill of Rights was to limit the power of the federal government. (MC)

2

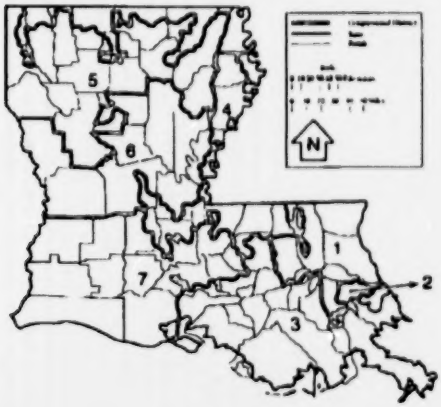
61 percent recognized that the attitudes toward government regulation expressed in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1905 decision in *Lochner v. New York* have changed and that it is generally accepted that the government should defend the health and safety of workers. (MC)

59 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to describe two factors besides political party identification that influence voter preference. A student who received a "Complete" score wrote "1) Where a certain candidate stands on specific issues. 2) Information about the candidate's past life or political life."

58 percent understood that U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* resulted in the federal government exerting greater influence in a policy area that had been dominated by states and municipalities. (MC)

55 percent understood that the "Connecticut Compromise" at the Constitutional Convention in 1787 meant that Congress would have two houses, one in which state representation was based on population and one in which all states had equal representation. (MC)

53 percent understood that the congressional district boundaries shown on the map were probably drawn by the Louisiana state legislature. (MC)



48 percent recognized that some U.S. citizens have opposed documents such as the United Nations Universal Declaration because they fear international agreements might force the United States to act in ways not consistent with its national interest. (MC)

60 percent recognized that students objecting to a decision to locate a landfill near their school could act to prevent it from happening by appearing before the town council to request that the landfill be placed elsewhere. (MC)

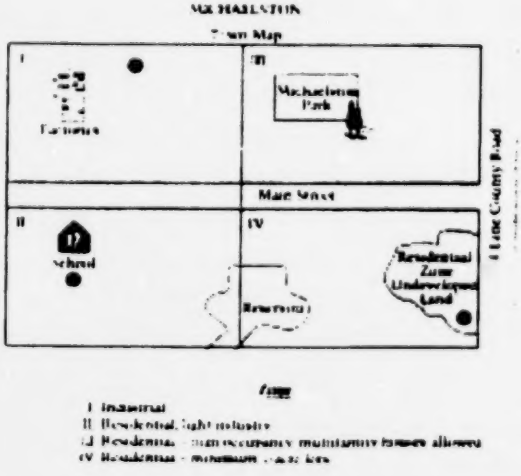
59 percent understood that the quotation from Judge Learned Hand given above implies that Americans can best protect their freedoms through political participation. (MC)

59 percent realized that there may be more than seven congressional districts in Louisiana in the year 2002 if the year 2000 census indicates that the population of Louisiana increased proportionately more than that of other states. (MC)

55 percent understood that a statement by John Locke, "Absolute arbitrary power, or governing without settled laws, can neither of them be consistent with the ends of society and government," argues that governmental power should be limited. (MC)

51 percent understood that a person wishing to open a business in zone III would need to get a zoning variance from the "Michaelston" town planning board. (MC)

50%



47 percent understood that the state government would be most likely to become involved in the decision about where to locate a landfill in the town of "Michaelston" if developers tried to put the landfill on a site that was likely to affect agriculture in other counties in the state. (MC)

45 percent understood that while Congress and the courts have some authority over foreign policy, the President and the state department have the greatest authority. (MC)

40 percent knew that the system of school segregation overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* was the result of state laws. (MC)

37 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to describe one policy area in which state governments affect the lives of citizens and to describe one way in which citizens can affect state government's policy in this area. A student who received a "Complete" score wrote that "1) The policy of obtaining a driver's license affects citizens because each state has different procedures, rules, and regulations. If you want to drive you must comply. 2) By voting on propositions that were created to change these rules, citizens can affect state government's policy in this area."

31 percent knew that most bills introduced in the House of Representatives are never sent by committee to the full House. (MC)

30 percent understood that the Supreme Court's 1905 decision in *Lochner v. New York* ruled that a law limiting the number of hours people could work was unconstitutional. (MC)

47 percent understood that congressional district 2 in Louisiana must include a large urban area. (MC)

46 percent understood that countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more political parties than those with single-member district systems because parties in proportional representation systems do not have to win a majority of the vote in any one district, making it easier for smaller parties to gain representation in the legislature. (MC)

40 percent understood that one argument in favor of a single-member district system as opposed to a proportional representation system is that the former system requires voters to make choices about individual candidates rather than simply vote for a party. (MC)

39 percent understood that one argument for a proportional system of representation is that in such a system the balance of power in the legislature is more representative of the popular vote. (MC)

36 percent knew that the Supreme Court was more likely to cite the Fourteenth Amendment in *Brown v. Board of Education* than Article 4 of the Constitution, the Tenth Amendment, or the Thirteenth Amendment. (MC)

35 percent understood that Justice Peckham, who wrote the majority opinion in *Lochner v. New York*, argued for judicial activism to limit government power, while Justice Harlan, author of the minority opinion, argued for judicial restraint, but for a more active role by government. (MC)

30 percent recognized that the Supreme Court's power to overturn unconstitutional laws is a limit on the power of majorities. (MC)

25 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to list two ways the American system of government is designed to prevent "absolute arbitrary power." A student receiving a "Complete" score wrote "1. the legislative branch, judicial branch, & executive branch checks and balances each other so no one gets too powerful. 2. The Constitution & amendments are made so that people know what the laws are."

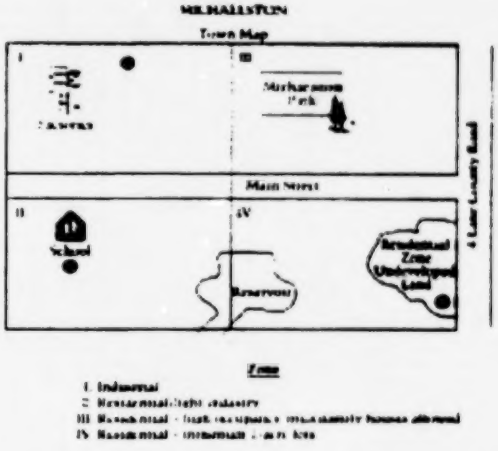
24 percent received a "Complete" score when asked to give two possible explanations for congressional districts with irregular boundaries. A student who received a "Complete" score wrote that "1) The districts may have been gerrymandered to promote the election of a specific party. 2) The boundaries may have been drawn to get an equal proportion of the population for each district."

10 percent gave either a "Complete" (1 percent) or "Acceptable" (9 percent) answer when asked to explain the significance of this figure of justice and give one reason why the values are important to American constitutional democracy. A student giving a "Complete" answer wrote that "Justice does not care who you are is what the blindfold stands for. The Scales represent, that Justice will be fair and even in her ruling. Without an honest and fair judiciary system we will become corrupt an uneffective."

25%

25 percent understood that the majority decision in *Lochner v. New York* is supported by the idea that government should play as small a role as possible in civil society and the economy. (MC)

23 percent gave a "Complete" answer when asked to use the map of "Michaelston" to determine whether a landfill was most likely to be located at site A, B, or C and to explain why it was more



likely to be located at the site they chose than at the other two sites. A student giving a "Complete" answer wrote "A, because it would be closer to the industries which produce a lot of waste instead of near people's homes."

9 percent gave a "Complete" answer when asked to explain two ways that democratic society benefits from citizens actively participating in the political process. A student giving a "Complete" answer wrote that "1) When citizens voice their opinion, congressmen see a variety of views from their constituents. Using all of these views, he can better act in favor of those he is representing. 2) Active participation in a democracy also limits any chance of dictatorship. It is virtually impossible for a majority to approve this with the system of federation provided by our constitution and our system of checks and balances. Citizens can protest if they see something they don't like and work together to get rid of it."

For Further Information

The NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card, NCES 2000–457, is the complete report.

Civics: What Do 4th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?, NCES 2001–460, and *Civics: What Do 8th-Graders Know, and What Can They Do?,* NCES 2001–462, are companion issues of *NAEPfacts*. Single copies are available free from ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, Md. 20794–1398.

The text of the Report Card, the companion *NAEPfacts*, and additional information about the Civics Assessment, including sample questions, may be obtained from the NAEP World Wide Web Home Page (see below).

The Civics Framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress. *National Assessment Governing Board, Washington, DC. (1996)* Copies may be obtained over the World Wide Web at **(http://www.nagb.org/pubs/civics.pdf).**

NAEPfacts briefly summarize findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The series is a product of the National Center for Education Statistics, Gary Phillips, Acting Commissioner, and Peggy Carr, Associate Commissioner for Education Assessment. This issue of NAEPfacts was prepared by **Carol Johnson** of NCES and **Alan Vanneman** of the Education Statistics Services Institute, based on previously published material.

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